

# Maurice Hinchey NEWS

## 26<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT, NEW YORK

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### **HINCHEY INTRODUCES BILL TO BAN DRILLING IN FINGER LAKES**

WASHINGTON - U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today joined U.S. Rep. James Walsh (R-NY) in introducing a bill that would permanently ban oil and gas drilling in the Finger Lakes National Forest. A spending bill passed earlier this year prohibits drilling at the site for one year.

"The Finger Lakes National Forest is the only National Forest in New York," Hinchey added. "It is enjoyed by tens of thousands of visitors each year. Drilling would have a permanent adverse impact on this precious resource and we cannot allow it to happen."

The FLNF was established by an Act of Congress in 1983 and has since become a popular destination for hikers, campers, horseback riders, and nature enthusiasts. It is also used for hunting, fishing, skiing and snowmobiling in the colder months. The U.S. Forest Service is currently proposing leasing 13,000 of the FLNF's 16,000 acres for oil and natural gas drilling. Hinchey wrote to the Forest Service in July to express his opposition to the drilling proposal. A final decision on the plan is expected this month.

The Senate version of the fiscal year 2002 Energy and Water Appropriations bill included a provision to permanently prohibit drilling in the FLNF. Hinchey and a bipartisan group of his upstate colleagues wrote a letter in September urging the House to adopt this language in the final version of the bill. The bill that was signed into law in November states that no federal permit or lease shall be issued for oil and gas drilling in the FLNF during fiscal year 2002. The legislation introduced today would make the proscription against oil and gas drilling permanent.

"The one-year ban was a great victory," said Hinchey. "We overcame an administration that has demonstrated a preference for drilling on public lands and a subcommittee chairman who opposed us. I'm prepared to fight for temporary bans each year if I have to. But a permanent prohibition is the best way to ensure the protection of this precious resource."